

**Testimony of Gabriel Fonseca, Program Manager
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**Prepared for the Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing – February 11, 2010
Public Hearing on the Governor's Budget Adjustments**

My name is Gabriel Fonseca, Program Manager of three **Children's Trust Fund programs and DSS Certified Fatherhood Initiative Program at Madonna Place**, a non-profit family support agency in Norwich. Our goal is to help our community prevent child abuse and neglect by supporting parents of all ages and social economic statuses. We accomplish our goal by conducting in home visits with first time parents, offering educational groups for fathers, and we provide individualized case management support to mothers and fathers. **I am writing today in opposition of the Governor's proposed budget adjustments.**

I am specifically asking you not to reduce funding for The Children's Trust Fund (CTF) and the Department of Social Services (DSS) community partners. Both CTF and DSS have been major supporters of our work with families for over 10 years. My staff is made up of dedicated, passionate and purpose driven professionals. All of our programs focus on improving the chances that children will have a promising future. In the past year, the three programs I am responsible for worked with over 500 family members from eastern Connecticut. Many of these individuals were given support to help them find and maintain employment. Others used our services to help them develop better parenting skills. Overall, we helped a large number of parents meet the needs of their children. In these tough economic times, we have seen a steady increase in people looking for help. The simple fact is more and more people need help. We are a respected business in downtown Norwich that helps people. Our business is a staple in the city of Norwich and beyond. Our agency employees almost 25 staff members. All of our staff members are compensated a living wage and contribute to our local and state economy.

I ask you to weigh the consequences of cutting and eliminating programs that have been shown to make a difference in people's live. If the Governor's budget plan is implemented our agency will be left with significantly less resources to meet the demands for services. Thus, a business decision must be made and jobs may be eliminated or scaled back. In turn, less people will receive the support they need to manage these tough times. Furthermore, our CTF: Nurturing Families Program is one of only over 40 programs across the state. If our agency is forced to eliminate jobs, it would be realistic to assume that many or all of the other programs across the state will do the same. **Is our state prepared to add more people to the already overcrowded pool of unemployed Connecticut residents?** Is our state leadership now saying that jobs are not important to our economy? I don't think that is the Governor's intent but often times our legislators

make decisions without measuring the consequences. I ask you to hear the beckoning call from Connecticut citizens, "We can't afford more jobs to be lost".

Our staff members help families in a strength-based manner and we are results driven. We understand the difficult issues families face and we use theory and proven best practices to help those in need. Our fatherhood program holds the John S. Martinez Award for Program Excellence. Currently we are one of six certified fatherhood programs in our state. Our program is the only DSS certified fatherhood program east of Hartford. Furthermore, our program is partially funded by CTF: Family Empowerment Program. Any cuts to our budget would greatly hinder our ability to support fathers. Without us there would be no formal options for fathers in eastern Connecticut. Research findings indicate that children from father-absent homes are five times more likely to live in poverty, three times more likely to fail in school, two to three times more likely to develop emotional and behavioral problems, and three times more likely to commit suicide. In addition, the main predictor of crime in a neighborhood is the percentage of homes without fathers. With the creation of the John S. Martinez Award for Program Excellence in 2004, Connecticut leads the nation in the area of supporting fathers and children. **Allowing the Governor to cut funding for programs that support fathers and families will set the state of Connecticut back.**

The current Federal Administration has clearly indicated a commitment to support and expand funding for states that are dedicated to fatherhood. The Governor's plan would send a negative message about our state's priorities and place us in a difficult position to secure additional federal grants. As it stands now, the state has more 1 ½ years left of Promoting Responsible Fatherhood (PRF) dollars. If Connecticut does not match the PRF grant now or in the future over one million dollars will be lost.

I understand this is a difficult decision you and your colleagues must make. You have received many pleas and much information from community programs and agencies. I trust that you will identify the common theme among all our pleas. The theme that should be evident is one of collectiveness and interconnection. Many of us are asking for our programs to be spared because we are helpers and we know what our society will become without helping hands and minds working together. Our state is fortunate to have people with caring hearts who are willing to help those in need. I ask you, please consider this information and please protect our resources, the citizens of Connecticut depend on you to do the right thing.

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